

Exhibit No. 19

My name is Bernie Jacobs. I'm a native Montanan, as were my parents. My father was a veteran of WWII, I'm a veteran of Viet Nam and Iraq, and my son is also an Iraq war veteran.

I want to briefly address this committee about the idea of privatizing the Montana State Veterans Home from both perspectives; as a veteran and as a native Montanan.

First, as a veteran, I find the mere idea of privatizing the Montana Veterans Home to be both offensive and deeply insulting. The very suggestion that the value of the service and sacrifice of Montana veterans and their families can be reduced to or quantified by whatever amount of money that a low bidder is willing to pay to take over MVH ..., well that idea is beneath contempt. In reality, there is no way to quantify that service and sacrifice or to thank veterans for it, but the one thing we can do is make sure we never to anything to devalue it. *That's what the idea of privatizing the vet's home does.*

Imagine how a Montana soldier or marine or airman or sailor who is serving in Iraq or Afghanistan right now will feel when he or she gets the news from home that his or her service to our country is worth no more to this session of the legislature than the amount of a low bid.

They don't deserve that and neither do the vets that served before them or who will serve after them. It's sort of like getting a "Dear John" letter from the 62<sup>nd</sup> Montana Legislature! Do those of you who might support this idea really want to send that message to Montana's service men and women and their families – past and present?

If you do, then please at least spare them the hypocrisy of ever thanking one of them for his or her service again, assuming you ever have.

Second, as a native Montanan I feel compelled to point out an important perspective that seems to have gotten lost in the discourse about this idea over the past several weeks. I'm referring to <sup>the</sup> historical perspective.

The Montana Veterans Home was built in 1896 after a group of Montana's pioneer citizens found it totally unacceptable that veterans of the Civil War and the Indian Wars were living in poor farms across the state because there was no place else for them to go. These people obtained contributions from other people living in the area to finance construction of a veterans home, and also

*FLATHEAD VALLEY*

convinced the Great Northern Railway to donate about 140 acres of land upon which to build it. That's where the Veterans Home sits today.

These pioneer citizens started a rich tradition of caring for veterans that is still alive today. <sup>at</sup> The Montana Veterans Home <sup>is part of Montana's history.</sup> ~~It's a~~ <sup>This Facility is</sup> a symbol for all to see of the core goodness and high values of all Montanans that has been uninterrupted since the earliest days of our statehood. Montanans have unquestioningly supported it <sup>as a state-run facility</sup> with their taxes through far worse times than these; through the great depression, through two world wars, through periods of economic recessions or high inflation, through draughts, through lots of bad crop years, through periods of high unemployment, and the list of examples goes on and on.

As a result of this continuous caring for veterans, the Montana Veterans Home <sup>has come</sup> ~~represents~~ <sup>to</sup> a tangible connection for all of us to Montana's past. It's ~~something~~ <sup>a place</sup> that any one of us can visit or look at from a distance and feel a real surge of pride in who we are and where we live because of all the good things the Veterans Home represents.

So, I have to ask, in light of this history, do any of you <sup>right</sup> really want to be identified in the chapter of Montana history that is being written <sup>right</sup> now as being the legislators who broke the mold, who crushed this wonderful part of Montana's history, who said for generations yet to come that it really wasn't that important?

Do any of you really want to be known to later generations of Montanans as the ones who kicked dirt in the faces of our veterans and in the faces of all the Montanans who have willingly supported the Montana Veterans Home since 1896?

I hope not! This idea is absolutely contemptible and it should be treated that way. Our veterans and the Montanans who came before us deserve honor and respect for what they did, not the insult and <sup>as for</sup> disrespect that this idea represents. Please show them that honor and respect <sup>as for</sup> on behalf of all of us by treating this idea with the contempt it deserves. That's what should be written in the history books.

Thank you.